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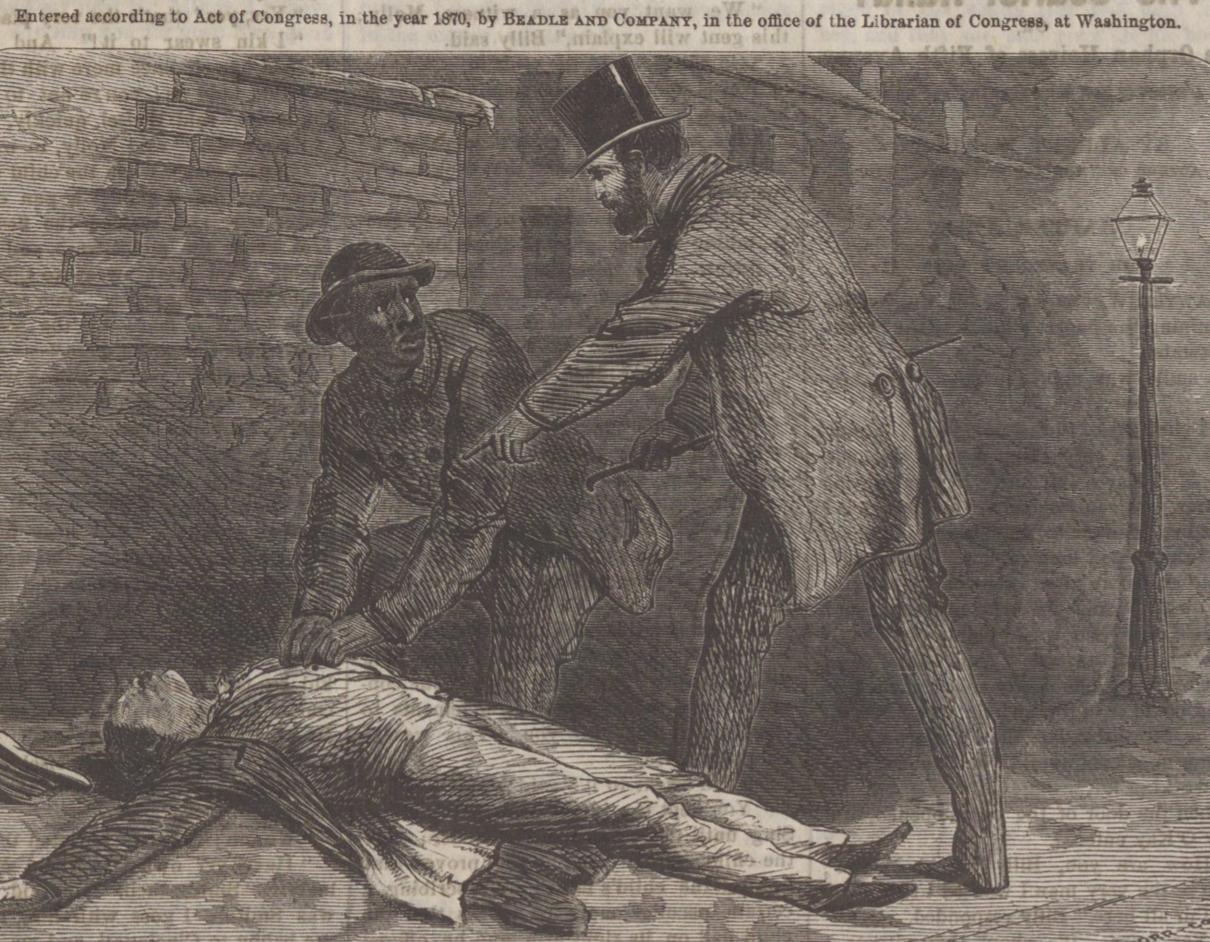
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\$50,000 Reward,

THE ROMANCE OF A RUBY RING.

OR,
A PHILADELPHIA HISTORY AND MYSTERY.

BY WM. MASON TURNER, M. D.,

Author of "The Masked Miner," "Under Bail," "Silver Heels," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISSING.

The long, stormy winter night had passed, the day broke, and the glad sunlight shone over the face of the snow-covered earth. The clouds had blown themselves away, and the air, though keen and frosty, was clear and brilliant.

The pavements were covered deep with the glittering drapery of the Ice-king, the car-tracks were blocked, and huge drifts of the driven snow were piled all along the southern exposure of the streets running east and west.

But the rising sun brought with it no consolation for poor Fanny, the colored maid of Sadie Sayton. The girl's eyes were red with weeping, and her face so wan and haggard after a wakeful night, wore a brooding, anxious expression.

Soon after Sadie had left her room in the hotel on the night before, the colored girl had dropped cosily into an arm-chair, and in her own rade way set herself to thinking; and then, before Fanny knew it, she had slid very naturally into a half-doz—then into a sound sleep. The girl was soon in the land of dreams. She slumbered on and was only awakened by the hoarse shouting of firemen, and the jingling of their clamorous bells, a company dashed by toward the scene of some conflagration.

Fanny sat up in the chair, and rubbed her eyes. Then she started and glanced at the clock which was ticking so loudly on the wall. Then the girl cast her eyes toward the bed.

That bed was smooth and unrumpled.

Fanny sprang to her feet. Sadie had not returned, and the hands on the clock pointed to half-past twelve.

Up and down the room strode the girl, now and then—in fact almost momentaneously—pausing and bending her ear, when she thought she had at last caught the welcome sound of steps, which she knew so well.

But then the steps passed on by the door of the chamber, and died away gradually in another direction. And then a look of disappoiment crept over the sable face of the anxious servant.

Thus the time wore on, and still Sadie Sayton came not. Fanny would have gone out in the storm, in search of her missing young mistress; but she was afraid—not of the storm itself—but that she would get lost. Then, too, her mistress might return at any moment.

And all night long, from the time she had been awakened by the fire-bells, Fanny walked up and down the room anxiously—fearfully.

The day dawned—the sun arose, and still the girl strode up and down the apartment, listening as ever intently for the coming footsteps of her mistress, which would bring contentment and rest to her wearied, troubled soul.

And Sadie had not yet come.

The breakfast hour at the hotel rolled around, and at the proper time Fanny descended. But the affectionate creature

could not partake of what had been prepared. She was thinking of her mistress, and of her unaccountable absence. "She did not, however, speak of her troubles or anxiety to any one, but returned to Sadie's room sad and downhearted as ever.

The sun arose gradually in the heavens, and the day was speeding away. Eleven o'clock rolled around.

Still Sadie Sayton had not returned; still Fanny, the colored girl, walked the room by turns, and gazed anxiously from the window. But the well-known form of her, so dear to her, did not appear.

Suddenly the girl paused in her restless promenade; a thought had struck her.

It was now a bright, clear day, and now, too, there was no danger of being lost. She would go out and search for her mistress, and inquire after her.

Alas! The poor girl did not realize what a large city spread around her, swallowed her up as it were; she could not comprehend but that *some one* must have seen "Miss Sadie," and could give her tidings of the absent one.

The girl lost no time in putting her newly-awakened thought into the shape of a resolve, and then this resolve into speedy execution.

She was soon arrayed for outside weather. Then carefully locking the door, she left word with a maid on that floor, to tell Miss Sayton, in case she returned soon, that the key was with the clerk. Then she hurried down-stairs, thence through the long hall, out into the cold, busy street, along which cutters were dashing and sleigh-bells jingling.

The girl was at first bewildered; but, after standing still for a moment, recovered herself, and joining the throng walked up Chestnut street. At every female figure which she passed, she gave a quick, scrutinizing glance; but she did not stop.

Suddenly, however, as she reached the corner of Twelfth and Chestnut, she paused as if shot.

Her gaze was bent upon the tall form of a man just ahead of her. He was hurrying across the street to the opposite—that is, the north side.

With startling eyes and mouth ajar, the girl riveted her stare upon the gentleman. But it was evident he had not seen her; for without looking around, he reached the other side of Chestnut street, turned directly up, and hastening on, entered the Chestnut street theater.

It was the hour for rehearsal. Then the girl stood still for a moment, recovered herself, and joining the throng walked up Chestnut street. The day wore itself slowly away; four o'clock came, and the silent hearse drew up in front of the lonely dwelling on that humble thoroughfare of "downtown." Behind came a single carriage. In that vehicle was a minister.

Then the good doctor's carriage drew up. In a few moments all were within the house.

Then a last view was taken of the pinched face of the dead woman lying so calm, so still in the coffin; then the lid was screwed down—then the coffin solemnly borne forth, and placed in the hearse waiting for it.

Agnes, leaning on Frank Hayworth's arm, walked firmly down, and entered the carriage. The minister, and then the young actor, followed; and in a moment the little procession was in slow progress.

The cemetery—Laurel Hill—was reached, a few words were spoken, in a solemn, hushed tone, by the minister, and then the remains were lowered to their last resting-place.

And then the carriage was turned toward home. What a home now for Agnes Hope!

As they were leaving the gate, two men passed by; one was a gigantic black, the other a white man. Frank Hayworth started slightly as he saw them.

But then the carriage rattled away.

Late that evening, Willis Wildfern strolled into the office of a morning paper. In a moment or so he came forth, and sauntered down-town. He finally reached Locust. Up this street he turned.

That night Frank Hayworth was quite tame as *Hawshaw*; and the part of the giddy Emily St. Evermond was not played by Agnes Hope, the orphan.

At first, people were inclined to laugh at

the poor, simple-hearted creature; but when they marked how earnest were her words, and when they saw tears standing in the girl's eyes, they spoke kindly to her.

All day long Fanny wandered about,

Several times she had been completely lost,

but was soon set right again.

She did not return to the hotel to dinner, but kept up her search, and continued to ask all she met

if they had seen or heard anything of "Miss

Sadie."

And then the day was drawing to a close,

and the shadows in the street were lengthened and distorted.

And Fanny's search had been fruitless.

Slowly the poor girl turned herself about,

and with tears in her eyes, and sadness in her heart, commenced to retrace her steps

toward the hotel.

As she passed a policeman, who stood on

the corner of a street, she paused.

A new idea had struck her.

She would speak to him and get his advice.

She told the officer all her trouble, and then asked his assistance.

The policeman looked very grave and serious when he heard the strange tale told him.

At first he did not answer, but scrutinized the girl's face searching.

It was evident he did not

at first believe her statement; or perhaps he

thought that she was crazed; and he bade

her tell the story again, watching her keenly

all the time, to detect some flaw, some inconsistency.

But Fanny did not blinder;

she told the same tale again, and, as before,

her tears flowed profusely.

She begged the policeman pitifully to help her friend, her "Miss Sadie."

The officer questioned her closely and rapidly for a few moments—learned how long she had been in the city—gained an inkling of the object of her visit, found out

about Sadie going to the theater, and her failure to return to the hotel.

Then he paused in his questioning, and pondered for several moments.

Looking up, however, he bade the girl return to the hotel, and not to go out, and that he would see that proper

search was made for her mistress.

Fanny hurried home at once; but as yet

she had not acquainted those at the hotel with the absence of Sadie.

Late that evening, when the officer was relieved at his post, he hastened down Chestnut street, and called at the theater.

The lamps were just lit in front of the play-

house.

The officer waited impatiently a few moments.

Then the doors were opened.

Upon inquiring he learned nothing more

than what the reader already knows.

The box-agent told him that a young lady an-

swering to the description, as given by the

officer—he having received the same mi-

nutely from Fanny—had purchased an or-

chestra seat late the previous evening, just

a moment before the curtain had gone up.

Further than that he knew nothing; per-

haps the watchman could tell him.

After waiting awhile that individual ap-

peared.

He had seen a girl lying, half-supported, in

a man's arms, in the lobby, after the theater

was out.

Who the man was he could not

say. He might know him should he see him again, and—he might not. But he

stated that when he returned that night from

hauling the fires, and extinguishing the

lights, the girl had disappeared, and the

man was standing on the pavement.

This was all the officer could learn at

the theater; and he then hastened away to the St. Lawrence Hotel.

There he bade his steps toward the Central Station House.

Before eight o'clock that night a special

detail of detectives were quietly scattering

about in the great city, in search of Sadie

Sayton.

When the policeman had stood that even-

ing in the Chestnut street theater, and spoke with the night-watchman, he had not

noticed that a tall man was standing in the shade of one of the large lamps,

and glared at the two.

Nor had he heard the low, satisfied chuckle

of the tall man, as he rubbed his hands to-

gether and walked away.

That man was Willis Wildfern; he had

just parted, in a low quarter of Juniper

street, from a gigantic black. And as he

walked on, he muttered to himself.

In a few moments he had handed an ad-

vertisement, in a disguised hand-writing,

to one of the clerks in the office of a morning

paper.

And Willis Wildfern, with a contented

shrug, paid in advance for the advertise-

ment.

Still poor Fanny walked the room in the

hotel; but as yet she had heard no welcom-

ing footstep, and despair was fast unnerving

her.

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CHARTER XXV.

FRANK HAYWORTH uttered an exclama-

tion of vexation, as he finished his vain

search through his pockets. He had, no

weapon about him, not even a pen-knife;

hind him the lights ended in a more brilliant perspective than in front; for in the latter case the scattered gas-lamps stretched away into absolute darkness. In fact they did not extend many squares below Catharine street.

The young man was not far from this thoroughfare; one block more and he would have been there.

Frank Hayworth was not a coward; his courage had been put to the test in other places, and under other circumstances.

But this was a lonely place, and he had noticed that the two men had kept persistently ahead of him, ever since he had crossed Locust street. He was unarmed, too, and he was convinced—for he seemed to feel it—that those late prowlers had their eyes upon him, and meant him no especial good.

This was annoying; he was anxious to get to Catharine street, to the lodgings of poor Agnes, that he might speak to her words of comfort and friendship. He did not wish to turn back; for he fancied that, whenever they were watching him, they knew of his errand—that this espionage over his movements might have some connection with Agnes, who was all alone in the dreary, desolate house in this disreputable quarter of the city. He feared that if he turned back Agnes might be exposed to some wicked attempts of those who would harm her.

This reflection determined him upon his course of action; he would not leave the poor girl thus exposed. He knew of a certain party in the city, who on more occasions than one had persecuted her, and he knew something of a promise and an oath!

He determined to go on at all hazards. And on the morrow, however much talk it might create, he intended, if the girl consented, to remove Agnes to the boarding-house in which he himself had lodgings. She could there be under his protection.

Buttoning his overcoat around him, the young man keeping his eyes well about him, strode forward along the lonely way.

He reached the gloomy shade of the old burnt walls, hanging threateningly over the street, and as yet he had seen no more of the two figures, who had disappeared just there.

Do what he could, Frank Hayworth trembled slightly, as, at last, he stood full in the black shadow; and then he quickened his pace. He was almost clear of the place—his feet were upon the next sidewalk—when in the twinkling of an eye, two forms dashed out silently from behind a low, scathed wall, and advanced upon him.

Before the actor could speak, their intention was evident.

The young man paused and retreated rapidly; but one of those attacking rushed boldly on him.

Then suddenly Frank Hayworth again paused, and as the waylayer dashed forward, he met him with a heavy blow in the face. Nothing human could stand up under that vengeful stroke, and the man went down like an ox.

But before the actor could follow up his advantage, the other, a perfect giant in stature, rushed upon him and dealt him a stunning blow with his clinched fist.

The stroke fell with a fearful thud. Without a groan or a cry, the actor sank on the snow-covered walkway.

In an instant the Herculean fellow was above him—his red eyes burning down upon the dead-white face of the prostrate man.

His hands in his pockets. In a moment, he had rudely torn open the overcoat, and was about searching the vest-pockets, when suddenly a faint sparkle as from a stone glittered in his eyes. With a low chuckle, the man stooped, unfastened the small diamond-pin, and was about transferring it to his own pocket, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Give me the jewel, my good fellow; I want it as evidence. Besides, I will balance it in gold, and you can keep what else you may find."

Thus spoke a voice in low tone at the other's elbow.

The words came from him who had fallen before Frank Hayworth's first and only blow.

The gigantic fellow hesitated for a moment.

"All right, of course. Any thing to accommodate you," and he handed the stone to the other.

This man quickly placed it in his vest-pocket, and then said:

"Come, we must be off—Pshaw! never mind him; he'll come to. So don't look scared. Now, hurry to the rendezvous; tonight we must meet. I'll meet you at half-past one."

"All right; I am off," said the man, turning at once; and he hurried back up Twelfth street.

Then he who had received the diamond stood still for a moment and gazed about him.

"All right!" he muttered, "Two birds with one stone! Ay! And, yes, the coast is clear. Now, my pretty one, we will see if certain memories—old-time pledges, hold good with you! We'll see, too, if a mark can be made! Something to make up for the other failure!"

So saying, he hurried away toward Catharine street.

And Frank Hayworth lay quiet—apparently lifeless, in the chilling snow.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES.

* * * * * AGNES HOPE walked uneasily up and down the limits of the room, in which we have seen her. A deep shade of anxiety was upon her face, and her eyes glanced furiously, flaringly, around her. Anon she would pause, and bend her ear, as some chance sound echoed in the quiet room.

But again, with a sad shake of the head, she would resume her restless promenade; and then the anxious, yearning expression deepened to one of downright fear.

The girl halted and glanced timidly around her. Her gaze fell upon the bed. Despite her efforts she shuddered and started back.

The bed was now neatly arranged; the white sheets were scrupulous in their appearance, and so folded down as to cover the largest rent in the old threadbare coverlid.

But Agnes remembered well the scene of the night before; however tight she might close her eyes, there on that bed she could see the shrunk form, the pallid death-dewed features, and hollow eyes of her poor old mother—the one who had loved her so affectionately, so devotedly, since the dawn of her recollection.

And that mother was gone now; her wan, yet always welcoming, face was hidden beneath a coffinlid, away down under the overlying snow and the frozen mold of the quiet Laurel Hill.

Agnes felt her loneliness keenly; she missed the kindly company of her invalid mother; she missed the dim eye flashing forth its faint, but earnest welcome; she missed the tremulous words of greeting, the warm embrace of a mother's love.

Silently she gazed at the bed; and as she looked, the expression of fear and shrinking passed slowly away. A soft, subdued quiet stole over her pale features—tears bedimmed her large, black eyes, and with a gurgling sob, which she strove to repress, the orphan girl sunk down upon her knees—her face buried in the faded, time-worn coverlid.

Long she knelt there without sign or motion, in the awe-inspiring silence of the lonely chamber.

Agnes Hope was praying!

Suddenly a neighboring clock sounded on the quiet air. Its echoes flooded the lonely room, and startled the ears of the orphan maiden.

The girl started and raised her face—face wet with tears; then she slowly arose to her feet.

Though her eyes were red, and her face wet with her falling tears, and marked with lines of agony and suffering which had torn her bosom; yet the expression resting on the sad countenance now, was sweet and resigned, like unto that of a spotless vestal.

The girl's prayer had been answered; she had sought and found,

"Surcease of Sorrow."

The echoing clock-bell vibrated in the room, and its solemn quaver recalled the girl to her lonely, cheerless situation.

"Eleven o'clock!" she muttered.

"Thank God for it! For—for—Frank will soon be here, and I believe I would die if I had to stay here all alone!"

The play will soon be over, and Frank promised

to come as soon as the curtain was down.

What would people say—the great, idle, gossiping world—God be thanked that our world is not large—if it were known that Frank Hayworth and myself stayed alone in this old house to-night!"

The pure, guileless maiden started as she asked herself the question, and for an instant a spreading blush crimsoned her cheeks. But this passed off almost at once, as she murmured:

"Let them talk—those who may! God, the searcher of all hearts, knows where dwells real innocence. And yet—"

She paused again, and once more the carnation tint bloomed on her thin, white cheeks.

"Yes," said Billy.

"I've just made a memorandum of the history that she is to swear to."

"Good strong sweater?"

"Oh, yes. She'll swear to anything you like, and stick to it, too, under the hardest cross-examination, provided you pay her enough, and she's quite reasonable as to terms."

"That's good," said Weisel, approvingly.

"All you've got to do is to let her know what you want. She is a little stupid, at getting hold of any thing, 'cos she's soaked in liquor 'bout all the time. But if she once gets it all into her head, the devil himself can't drive it out."

"She'll be the very woman," said Weisel, with an air of triumph. "You see I want her to personate the wife of the English burglar, Jimmy Kand, alias Jimmy the Tiger, who had charge of the child in Sing Sing village, who carried it out West and then brought it to New York city, as I told you the other day, if you remember."

"Yes," said Billy.

"I've just made a memorandum of the history that she is to swear to."

"That's the ticket!" cried Billy.

"Jist you read it over to her two or three times so as to git it into her head, an' she'll swear to it as nat'rally as if it all happened to her."

"Let's be going, then."

So Weisel and Billy started for the "Traveler's Rest."

Weisel found that it was a little basement liquor saloon as Billy had said.

The two entered and inquired for Irish Molly.

"She's up-stairs in her room," said the woman behind the little bar.

"Here, Patsy!" and she called to a tow-headed urchin to show Mr. O'Kane."

Billy was well known in that region—"to Irish Molly's room."

The boy conducted the two to a terribly dirty little room on the second story.

Irish Molly sat on a low stool, smoking a short black pipe. The household articles in the room were few in number; consisting only of the stool upon which Molly sat, an old straw mattress spread upon the floor with a ragged blanket over it, a broken chair, a small bit of looking-glass, held by tacks to the wall, and a suspicious-looking black bottle.

Molly herself was a stout, gross-looking woman of fifty, with bloated features and coarse, yellowish-gray hair.

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She was a stout, gross-looking woman

taken to discover and recapture her. Second, to inform him of the existence of a second Allyne Strathroy, and of the claim that the second Allyne had put forward respecting the Strathroy estate.

Allyne heard the lawyer's story through without comment.

"It's a very ugly affair," said Chubbet,

after he had finished.

"You think, then, that this man—my half-brother—can claim the whole estate?" asked Allyne, thoughtfully.

"Beyond a doubt, if he can establish the marriage of his mother with your father, and prove his own identity. And from the papers his lawyer has allowed me to see, there can be little doubt that he will succeed in doing it."

"And yet he offers to compromise for fifty thousand dollars?"

"Yes, and my dear Mr. Allyne, I believe that I am advising you for your own good when I say that you ought to accept it," said Chubbet, with dignity.

"But, if they are so sure of their case, why should they want to compromise?" asked Allyne.

"To avoid the lawsuit, which will be long and expensive," replied the lawyer.

"I must say, that they have acted in a very straightforward and honorable manner in the affair. Their claim is strong beyond a doubt; but, don't take my word for it. Examine with your own eyes. They offer fairly. They will let you examine both the papers and the witnesses; put any questions you like to them. They feel so sure that you yourself will see the justice of their claim, under your father's will, that you will not hesitate for a moment in compromising the affair."

"It does look as if they felt certain of winning!"

"Of course it does!" cried Chubbet. "As I have said, they have acted very honorably in the matter. Why, if they had chosen, the first notification of the affair that we would have received, would have been a summons to appear and 'show cause,' etc."

"That is very true," said Allyne, thoughtfully, and with a gloomy brow. The blows were coming thick and fast upon him.

"Of course it is true, my dear boy. For your own sake, I advise compromise. If you insist upon carrying the matter into the courts, and they should triumph, you would lose every thing. Therefore, compromise while you can, I am acting for your interest in giving this advice."

"I will examine into the affair. Is there a weak spot in the chain of evidence that they offer?"

"Well," said Chubbet, thoughtfully, "the question of this Allyne's identity is the point. The marriage of his mother they can prove. There isn't a doubt. I have examined the papers, and they can not be questioned. But the identity of the young man—only a year older than yourself—unless they can prove beyond a doubt that he is Allyne Strathroy, son of your father, Clinton Strathroy, and Lizzie, his first wife, whose maiden name was Duke, their whole case falls to the ground. But, if they can prove it, his claim to the estate, under your father's will, can not be disputed."

"How do they intend to prove this man's identity?" Allyne asked.

"By the woman who had charge of him while a baby. He has some peculiar mark on his body, too, that will in a measure serve to identify him," replied Chubbet.

"Then the whole case will rest on this woman's evidence?"

"Yes."

"I must see her, then," said Allyne, firmly.

"They are perfectly willing."

"They must be sure, then, that her evidence will prove what they want," said Strathroy, in a tone of conviction.

"Yes; it looks like it, certainly."

"I will see the woman, but I must see her alone. I think that I am acute enough to detect whether she is telling the truth, or only a story that she has been paid to swear to."

"I will tell Mr. Weisel—he is the lawyer on the other side, a sharp fellow—and ask him to bring or send the woman up here this evening."

"Very well; that will do," Allyne replied.

"I trust I will have Miss Blanche in my hands soon. She can not escape the search long," Chubbet said, as he departed.

Allyne's brow was sad and gloomy; and no wonder, for over his heart, like a grim shadow, lay the remembrance of a scarlet crime.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TRAPPING THE BIRD.

CHUBBET, after leaving the house of Strathroy, proceeded at once to his office by means of an omnibus.

The lawyer had not been in the office five minutes, when one of the detective firm, whom he had employed to search for Blanche, entered.

"Any news?" asked Chubbet, anxiously.

"Yes; we have found out where she is."

"Ah, indeed?" exclaimed Chubbet, in joy.

"Yes; a lucky accident put us right on the scent. The young lady is over in Jersey City. The policeman on duty at the ferry used to be up-town. Fifth avenue, from Twentieth to Thirtieth street, was in his beat,

and he knew Miss Maybury by sight very well. Well, when I inquired if he had seen any thing of her crossing the ferry—because I had a suspicion that she would try to get out of the city—he said yes. That she had crossed the ferry with another lady and a gentleman. Then on the other side I found the hackman that had taken the three in his coach. Of course, it was all plain sailing after that. I found the house easy enough. Now you can put your hands on the young lady whenever you like," said the detective.

"I'll go over at once!" exclaimed the lawyer.

"But won't you want any legal papers to get her?"

"Oh, bless you, no!" cried Chubbet.

"It's all a mistake. I can explain matters, so that she will have no objection to return. I don't wish to use any compulsion in the matter, whatever."

So, Chubbet, and the detective, hurried over to Jersey City.

Reaching the house wherein Blanche had taken refuge, the lawyer rung the bell.

The door was opened by the lady of the house, Mrs. Fuller, in person.

"I wish to see Miss Blanche Maybury, please," said the lawyer, blandly.

Mrs. Fuller was about to deny that Blanche was in her house, acting in obedience to orders given her by Leonard, but the lawyer, who anticipated what she was about to say, continued:

"I am Mr. Chubbet, madam, guardian to Miss Maybury. I know that the young lady is in your house, and I wish to speak with her. If you will oblige me by going and informing Miss Maybury that I am here, I am sure that she will not refuse to see me. I might demand this as a right, madam, as you must be well aware, as I am, her legal guardian and have a detective officer here to enforce my rights. But I am sure Miss Blanche will not refuse to see me. It is a dreadful mistake from beginning to end, and I trust that the young lady will not refuse to listen to my explanation."

The manner of the old lawyer—his bland politeness, and the absence of every thing that looked like a threat—had great weight with the old lady with whom Blanche had taken refuge.

"Well, I will see, sir," she said, "step into the parlor, please."

The lawyer and detective entered the parlor and sat down, while Mrs. Fuller went up-stairs with the message to Blanche.

In a few minutes the old lady returned and informed the lawyer that Blanche would see him.

Bidding the detective wait, Chubbet followed Mrs. Fuller out of the parlor.

"You will find the young lady in the back room at the head of the stairs," she said.

Chubbet bowed and ascended the stairs.

In a plainly-furnished room, the lawyer found Blanche.

"My dear Miss Blanche, I am extremely glad that you are willing to give me a chance to explain this terrible mistake," said Chubbet, in his bluntest tone, taking a seat at the same time by the girl.

"Mr. Chubbet, is there any explanation possible, of the way in which I have been treated? Deprived of my liberty, accused of being mad and shut up in a lunatic asylum. Can you explain it?" demanded Blanche, indignantly.

"Yes, my dear child, I can," said Chubbet, in a tone of voice that expressed deep emotion. "I have been deceived, my dear child, as well as you. It is all a terrible mistake. When I left you in the sitting-room in the doctor's house, I went downstairs and there I found Mr. Strathroy. He had his carriage outside and said that he would like to take you home if I had no objection. I thought that perhaps his society would be more agreeable than mine, and beside, I did not know very well how to refuse him. So I consented; got into my carriage and drove off. I hadn't the remotest idea but that you would reach home safely. You can judge of my astonishment, then, my dear child, when I called at the Strathroy mansion yesterday, and Mr. Allyne informed me that he thought your mind was affected and that he had left you at the doctor's house for treatment. I rushed up-town instantly; arrived at the doctor's house just about an hour after you had gone. Of course I was rejoiced at hearing of your release. I set the detectives at work instantly to find out whether you had fled; not for the purpose, my dear child, of carrying you back to that dreadful institution, but to offer you a home in my own house, for, my dear Miss Blanche, I am the same to you as a father now. I should have taken you to my own house long ago, but you were happy and contented as the guest of Miss Jennie Strathroy."

The explanation of the lawyer seemed reasonable to Blanche. She had never experienced the slightest unkindness at his hands. Indeed, he had always treated her with a father's kindness.

Blanche, too, being fully aware of the desperate passion that filled the breast of Allyne Strathroy, did not wonder at the scheme by which he had sought to restrain her liberty.

"Mr. Chubbet, I want to believe you innocent of this cruel attempt. I do believe that you are innocent," she said, hastily.

"Then, my dear child, show that belief by accepting the shelter of my roof. It cuts me to the heart, when I think of you being under the protection of strangers."

said Chubbet, in a mournful voice, and wiping an imaginary tear from his right eye.

"I suppose that you will have no objections to my friends calling upon me?" said Blanche.

"My dear, what do you take me for? Do you suppose, even for one single instant, that in inviting you to my house, I am inviting you to a prison? Of course not, my dear child. Have all the friends you like. You will be the mistress of the house. You shall not be commanded by any one, my dear, under my roof."

"Then I will write a line to some friends to let them know where they can find me."

"Certainly, my dear; I will wait," said Chubbet.

Blanche ran to her room, penned a few hasty lines to Margaret, telling her that her guardian had explained his ignorance of the wrong that had been done her, and that she had gone to his house. Then she gave the address, and begged Margaret to call upon her at once.

The letter finished, she placed it in an envelope, sealed it up, and gave it to Mrs. Fuller to post.

Then, getting her hat and cloak, she told the lawyer that she was ready to accompany him.

So, Blanche, the lawyer and the detective, all returned to New York together.

After crossing the ferry, the lawyer and Blanche got into a coach and proceeded to the residence of the lawyer.

On the way there, Chubbet spoke of Allyne Strathroy, and told Blanche that he intended to insist upon his tendering an apology for his conduct.

"No, no!" Blanche said, hastily; "do not speak of the matter at all. I forgive him, freely. I have caused him pain enough now, though, heaven knows, it is not my fault. Let it all be forgotten."

"Just as you please, my dear," answered Chubbet.

After leaving Blanche at his own house, in Madison avenue, the lawyer went at once to Allyne's abode.

"Alia!" he cried, in glee, as he entered the library, where Allyne sat, busy with gloomy thoughts. "I have secured the bird all right. She's at my house."

"I am glad of that," Allyne said, "but I am afraid that we will never be able to win her consent to marrying me."

"My dear boy," said the lawyer, "then we must do without it." Chubbet's face had a look full of meaning.

"I do not exactly understand you," said Allyne; but he had a pretty clear idea, though, of what the old lawyer meant.

"My dear Mr. Allyne, you want the girl; I want a certain sum of money—as per contract between us—when you marry Miss Blanche. Now, I do not think that we should allow ourselves to be defeated in our wishes simply because a foolish child chooses to say no, when she ought to say yes."

"My own idea," said Allyne.

"Exactly. Now Miss Blanche is in my house. I would have preferred that this should have taken place elsewhere, this affair that I'm about to speak of; but, since it can't be helped, why I'll allow my house to be used. I know a certain minister—he is without a pulpit just now on account of certain little irregularities—who, for a handsome fee, will marry you to Miss Blanche, even if the lady does not say yes."

"But, suppose she says no?"

"I intend to arrange it so that she won't say any thing," said Chubbet, quietly.

"There are certain drugs known to science that come under the head of soporifics. I will see that Miss Blanche partakes of one of these potent drugs in her food or wine. When she is drugged, the minister becomes ready, the marriage takes place, and once it is consummated, I should like to know how on earth she's going to help herself?"

"She will hate me when she awakes to the knowledge of the truth," said Allyne, thoughtfully.

"That's nothing unusual in a wife," replied Chubbet. "They generally hate their husbands. But, you'll have the proud consciousness of knowing that you've done something to deserve it."

"I'll do it!" cried Allyne. "I have determined that the girl shall be mine, and she shall be, though I sink my soul to the scorch of the uttermost perdition to obtain her."

The lawyer, despite himself, shivered at the fierce tone of the young man.

"The affair had better take place tomorrow evening," said Chubbet.

"Very well."

"I will make all the arrangements."

And the interview ended.

A CROSS-EXAMINATION.

ABOUT eight in the evening, the servant brought Allyne word that two persons, who said they came by appointment, were at the door.

"Show them into the parlor," said Allyne.

So the two, who were Lawyer Weisel and Irish Molly, were shown into the parlor.

"Now comes the trial," said Weisel, to himself, as they entered the parlor. "If she will only stick to her story, he'll knuckle, sure, and I'll be able to make my little stake."

"Ain't this high?" said Molly, surveying her figure in the full-length mirror.

The explanation of the lawyer seemed reasonable to Blanche. She had never experienced the slightest unkindness at his hands. Indeed, he had always treated her with a father's kindness.

Blanche, too, being fully aware of the desperate passion that filled the breast of Allyne Strathroy, did not wonder at the scheme by which he had sought to restrain her liberty.

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"Ain't this high?" said Molly, surveying her figure in the full-length mirror.

"Woman, you are lying!" cried Allyne, in strong agitation.

"I kin swear to it!" exclaimed Molly, defiantly.

"Swear to what? Swear to all of it?"

"Yes," answered Molly, stubbornly.

"Then you will swear to a lie!" Allyne exclaimed.

"True as gospel!" cried Molly. "I wish I die if it isn't."

"Yes, all truth except one thing, and that thing is a lie!"

"Which one?" asked Molly, astounded.

"To the scorch on the arm of the man.

The child that you left when you went to Boston had three moles forming a triangle on its arm, but no scar."

"Well, I'm blest!" growled Molly, in an undertone.

"The child never pulled a pan of boiling water over on it. If that child is alive to-day—a man—he has the three moles on his arm."

Molly looked thunderstruck but said not a word, to bedad the Dime Journals for the day.

"I guess this scheme, now

who were sure to welcome him with acclamation.

As I stood brooding over this new stroke of fate, a hand was laid upon my shoulder and a remembered voice said: "Well, Jack Marvin, old boy, at your old tricks again, eh? You always used to be famous for brown study. I should have thought you might have mastered the science by this time."

There stood Phil, sure enough, with my Annie on his arm! So I resolved to make the best of things, and put out both my hands.

"Phil, I am glad to see you, and happy to congratulate you, for this is, doubtless, Mrs. Staples."

Phil is the sharpest fellow I ever knew. I read in his eyes that he saw both recognition and disappointment in mine when I looked at Annie. He looked at her, and there was an answering twinkle in her own saucy orbs as he answered: "Ah, yes! you have met her before, as Miss Fanshaw, I think?"

She remembered me, then, and had talked me over to Phil—perhaps ridiculed me. I hoped she didn't suppose I was going to care.

So I made myself very sociable and merry with both, until by-and-by Phil said, turning to Annie:

"I believe I must leave you with Jack for a while—you seem to get on so well together. I see Julia beckoning to me from the other side of the room. *Ad revoir!* and kissing his hand gayly, he left us alone together.

By-and-by we saw him at the extreme end of the room talking earnestly to a lady who very much resembled Mrs. Staples.

She caught his eye and nodded to him, remarking: "that is Julia—my twin sister. Don't you think we are very much alike? I shall introduce you to her as soon as I have an opportunity. I think you will like her."

Why couldn't Phil have married Julia? I asked myself, discontentedly. He appears to like her very much. I believe he has a natural love of thwarting other people.

This was not eminently reasonable, of course, but my wound had not healed yet and was sensitive. It was very tantalizing, too, in Staples to leave his wife so much to my society. I wondered if she had ever confessed to him how desperately we had flirted together that night in the moonlight, a year ago. And why was he so attentive to his sister-in-law? Some European notion he had got into his head, no doubt. And why wasn't I, after three days' attendance on Mrs. Staples, introduced to Julia?

There was a queer little expression, I thought, on her face, as I suggested the promise she had made.

"It's an odd accident," she said, "but I am sure you would like Julia very much."

A strange suspicion had taken possession of my brain. "I hope you are not afraid of my liking her too much," I said, showing some sensitiveness in my tone. "She is engaged, perhaps, and kept out of my dangerous company on that account! It is very flattering, but it is entirely unnecessary. I shall never fall in love with Julia Fanshaw."

Mrs. Staples might understand by this, if she chose, that the memory of my love for her would be a perpetual shield against any other affection. But she only laughed a mocking little laugh.

"Oh, no, indeed, she is not engaged; but she is worse—she is married."

"Married!" I could not help exclaiming, at the risk of being rude. "And her husband?"

"Her husband," said Annie, turning her mischievous blue eyes full upon my face, "is no less a personage than Mr. Philip Staples."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, letting go her arm; "is Mr. Philip Staples a moron?"

I wish you could have heard the laugh that followed that question. "Oh, no, indeed!" said she, when she at last found breath; "he has been hoaxing you, but I can't keep it up any longer! You took it for granted, at first, that I was Mrs. Staples, and he humored the whim, that's all!"

If you can not foresee the *denouement*, reader, you must have had little experience in Cupid's tactics. Suffice it to say, that my luck took a turn that very evening, and has been uniformly good ever since.

The Brother's Sacrifice.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.

"AND SO YOU ARE TAKEN IN AND DONE FOR, AT LAST, POOR MOTH? HOW I pity you; and Nettie—what will she say?"

"As if I cared! What is she to me? But Tom, I wish you would be serious for once and quit your confounded teasing. I tell you I am in debt, sober earnest, and want you to be on your best behavior this evening, or I shall get into disgrace. You see, I have told Manuela, so much stuff about 'my adopted brother,' his nobleness of heart, learning, eloquence and all the rest, that unless you do your best, she'll accuse me of stretching the truth, and that, you know, to one of my meek and modest disposition, would be awful!"

The "adopted brothers," Fred Hill and Tom Clifton, were riding slowly along together on the outskirts of the city of Mexico, some time after its surrender to General Scott, leaving the place behind them. Their dress proclaimed them to be officers in the American army, and they exhibited a good deal of recklessness, if not bravery, in thus venturing, comparatively helpless, beyond the army lines, where one word would bring upon them a crowd of the treacherous, vindictive *loperos*, whose hatred of the "invaders" was only masked, not subdued.

More than one pair of glittering eyes flashed deadly glances after them from beneath the shelter of a slouched sombrero, or the folds of a serape, but, perhaps, the sight of the gleaming revolver-belts, whose reputation had spread far and wide, tended to restrain any overt attempt, for they were allowed to proceed unmolested.

We have seen that one of the horsemen made use of the term "adopted brother," but it was only since the breaking out of the war that their friendship began. One came from the east, the other from the west, but they found themselves in the same company, as captain and lieutenant, when they struck the alliance as brothers. Fred Hill had been promoted to a captaincy, and removed to another regiment, and then the friends had lost sight of each other for some months, until a few days previous to that upon which we find them riding together.

"Very well, then," laughed Tom Clifton. "I will exert myself to the utmost, and remember, if I can 'cut you out,' I'm going to do it."

"If you can, all right," returned Fred.

"Egotist! But, by the way, how did you form the acquaintance of this fair damsel of the musical name?" They are generally so reserved and haughty—these Spanish damsels—to us poor barbarians."

"You will see an exception to-day. But the way I made her acquaintance was this. It was when out on a little scout with my men, and getting wind of a gang of *guerrilleros* we made for them, intending to give the dogs a lesson. Well, so we did, and found among them, as prisoners, Manuela and her father, who were being detained for ransom. Of course, she was grateful, for being relieved from such companionship, while he was grateful at not being relieved of his dollars, for between you and I, the old gentleman is just the least taste in the world, a miser. The rest followed as a matter of course. I was invited to the house, went, made love to both señoras and señoritas, was accepted."

"What, by both?" quizzed Clifton.

"Bah! but here we are now, and remember, do your best, Tom," continued Hill, as they drew rein before a substantial-looking *hacienda*.

They were politely and warmly welcomed, and in five minutes were as cosy and comfortable as though at home. Then, under cover of the greetings between Fred and his *fiancee*, Clifton took a good survey of the three persons with whom he found himself.

The señor set down as a nonentity; señora as a veteran, and somewhat *passé* coquette; but Manuela—her glances rested longer! Of a superbly-rounded and graceful form, rather above the medium height, she moved with the languid, queenly, yet passionate air peculiar to her race, that fascinated while yet it reminded of the serpent or jaguar. In complexion a brionette, with glorious hair, large, lustrous, yet languid eyes; added to her piquant style of dress, it is little wonder that Tom Clifton pronounced her a splendid, celestial creature.

One calm, pleasant evening, Clifton announced to the Ibanez family that on the morrow his regiment was to march from the city, and that in all probability this would be his last visit, for some time, if not forever. The Don deeply regretted it, but looked the contrary; the Dona was in despair, but looked supremely indifferent. Tom was no company for her, preferring to flirt with Manuela, and such a crime as that was enough to ruin anybody in the fair lady's estimation.

But Tom did not care for them; he only looked at the señorita. She flashed one quick glance toward him, and then her eyes drooped, while the crimson flush died out, leaving her pale and trembling. Clifton calmed his face and engaged the others in a lively conversation, to cover Manuela's agitation, and thus afford her time to compose her feelings.

Ere long she joined in the conversation, and when he rose to take his leave, after bidding the others a polite adieu, she accompanied him to the threshold. He took her hand and then pleaded:

"Will you not walk down the avenue with me? Remember, 'tis the last time."

She did not answer, but took his arm, and then, beneath the calm rays of the moon, they walked on, longing yet dreading to break the silence. At length Clifton spoke, in an assumed tone of gaiety:

"Well, Manuela—I may call you so

intercepted their glances. Through their eyes their hearts spoke, and each felt that they were beloved by the one most dear upon earth to them, and yet they dared not give it utterance in words.

The thought of his confiding brother silenced Clifton; when even the longest for-avowal pressed to his lips, the face of Fred would appear, and he would resolutely choke down his feelings, and they would go on as before, outwardly calm or joyful, but inwardly loathing the flimsy mask they forced upon themselves to wear. But this could not last always.

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"Well, Manuela—I may call you so

sob, "I must speak, and you must listen. You know that he—Mr. Hill—did me a great service, and I was grateful for it. He was very pleasant and agreeable; I had never met one more so; and I—he asked me to be his wife. I thought I loved him, and I said yes. But then you came, and I—Must I say more?" she faltered, and covered her face with her hands, while her form shook with the force of her emotions.

Clifton partially extended his arms, but then turned his head aside with a bitter groan. Then he uttered, in a husky tone:

"We must think of him." Manuela, I must say farewell now, before I—"

"No, Thomas, no! I can not let you go! I do not love him—my heart's love is all yours!" and she bowed forward as if she would have fallen to the ground, had not he clasped her in his arms.

For a moment he forgot himself, his friend, all, save that he held the maiden whom he loved better than life in his arms, and rained passionate kisses upon her brow and lips. But then he gave a cold shudder and turned pale.

Manuela, darling, this must not be; think of him. How could we ever face him, as we must? Poor Fred! he loved, honored, trusted me, and now—but, no, I will go away. You will soon learn to forgive me, and think of this night, if at all, as a cruel, bitter dream; and he will never know. Look up, Manuela; be strong; it is better so."

She looked up at him with a face so full of woe and wretchedness that his heart struggled fiercely to assert its claims, but he resolutely choked it down, and with one long, lingering kiss, wrung her hand, and then leaped upon his horse, plunging the spur deep into its flanks and dashed madly along the grass-grown path.

Manuela turned and walked slowly back to the house, her heart crushed and bleeding.

It was some weeks ere the two brothers met, upon the eve of battle, and Clifton was surprised at the change wrought in the features of the gay and careless Hill, whose laugh was usually the clearest and most joyous, whose spirit was the life of his men. And there was a change, too, in the man's whole person, as if one just recovering from some severe illness.

He returned his brother's hand-pressure as warmly as ever, and listened to his regrets with a smile; but it, also, was changed.

Then he handed Clifton a small, neatly sealed packet, bidding him send or hand it to his promised bride should ought happen to him in the coming conflict.

"But, Fred, man, this is nonsense! Surely you, who have thus far escaped without a scratch, will not be foolish enough to get hurt now?"

It would be a happy world, Tom, if we could have all we wished here below. And now, old chum, let us part as friends should. Let us forgive all there may be to forgive. If I have ever wronged you in thought or deed, pardon me; and I promise the same," added Fred, in a solemn tone of affection.

"Fred," said Clifton, brokenly, "I have wronged you, though God knows how hard I struggled against the temptation. Sit down and let me tell you of it."

"No, Tom, not now; if we both live through to-morrow, then I will come. But not now—I could not bear it!" and with one warm hand-clasp, the two brothers parted.

For hours the conflict had raged stubbornly. Although foremost in the strife, the two brothers were still unharmed. But this was not always to be. With his company, Clifton headed one of those grand, terrific charges for which the cavalry were so famous in that war, dashing up direct into the jaws of death.

A blinding, withering flash of flame-tipped smoke, and they were hurled back! Back,

all save the dead and one, their gallant leader, whose horse had become ungovernable.

With a wild yell, his men rally to save their beloved commander, but alone

they would have been too late. A musket-ball strikes the horse and he falls, pinning

his rider to the ground. Two Mexican

spring forward to make sure work of one

whom they recognize as a terrible foe. But

a horseman, bareheaded and blood-stained,

waving his heavy sabre, dashes up before

them, dismounts, and strives to raise the fallen

man, while with one hand he parries the

jaws of death.

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man, while with one hand he parries the

jaws of death.

It was long ere Clifton could rise from his cot, and then, upon sick leave, proceeded to deliver his brother's message to Manuela. Their meeting was cold and commonplace, and a stranger would little have dreamed with what feelings they had parted from each other, but a few short weeks before, or the raging storm that concealed before neath those cold masks.

Without a word Manuela passed the closely-written pages to Clifton, and then he learned the secret of the deep change in his friend. Fred had hastened to visit Manuela

but hearing her voice as they came down the avenue, upon that memorable night, he had hidden in the copse to give them a surprise. What must have been his feelings when he heard their conversation?

He ended by praying that they would no longer strive against nature, but if they loved each other truly, to let no thought of him stand between them. In closing he expressed a wish that, if possible, he might be interred at the spot where he had heard his death-doom.

Manuela and Tom parted without a word. He could not speak, nor she listen,

to words of love, so soon after perusing the message from the dead. But the time came soon, and although they dropped a tear over the long, narrow mound marked by an humble cross, where rested the noble, true-hearted brother, they were supremely happy.

"When the cruel war was over, Tom

took Manuela back to his home on a brid

al visit, but they soon returned, and at last

accounts were still living in the grand old

ear, and the two were still living in the grand old

ear, and the two were still living in the grand old

On they came, halting within rifle-shot; and when the dust had cleared away, Captain Harding's party gave a glad shout of welcome, for they recognized Colonel Paul Rodney.

Each party now advanced, and there were glad greetings, and questions that could not be answered in a week's time.

"You have not found her?" asked Colonel Rodney. "I mean—"

"We have not found Meta," said Henry, sadly.

"Nor we," was the colonel's reply. "And we must give up the search now, for we are ordered to Washington without any delay. Fall in!"

CHAPTER XXVIL

THE PRINCE OF DOGS.

WHEN George Matthews found the tide of battle turning against him, he began to think of escape. But he could not leave without one more effort to retain Meta in his possession. He watched an opportunity, and when the combatants were shrouded with dust and smoke, he grasped the now hopeful girl, and before she was aware of his intentions, she was on a horse with him and galloping away.

It was then too late to cry for help, for her captor had bound a handkerchief over her mouth. She felt but little fear, however, for she doubted not that her friends would soon discover her absence, and come to the rescue.

George Matthews took his way down the ravine, notwithstanding the roughness of the path. He urged his overladen horse over the uneven ground, at a speed that threatened to unhorse them every moment; but he was a good rider, and desperate.

At last the faithful animal could go no further. He had been slackening his pace for some time, yet his master urged him with whip and spur until further efforts were useless. He jumped to the ground, taking Meta with him, and the horse fell over on his side, completely exhausted.

"It won't do to leave him alive," muttered Matthews. "He may wander up in sight, and bring them all after me."

Drawing his knife, he dispatched the poor horse at once. Then grasping Meta's hand, he hurried her along through the tangled bushes, dragging and carrying her by turns.

After a weary hour of this traveling, in which the poor girl's feet became bruised and sore, her hands and face scratched and bleeding, and her clothing rent in a hundred places, they came to a river.

Then George Matthews spoke to her for the first time since starting.

"I have eluded them, Meta," he said, triumphantly. "They may search all they please, but they can not overtake us now."

He removed the handkerchief from her mouth, but she only gave him a look of cold disdain.

"Your scorn is ill-timed," said he, starting toward the water, and taking her with him.

She saw a boat there; and when he bade her enter it, she obeyed, knowing how useless resistance would be.

"I hope you will keep the boat right side up," said he, ironically, for, with all her terror, she could not get over her scorn.

"You will not have Paul Rodney to rescue you if I do not," he replied, hotly, as he stepped in and took the oars.

"Then I may as well make up my mind to help myself, sir robber."

"Robber!" he shouted, his face livid with rage.

"I know no better name to call you," she returned, provokingly cool and haughty.

He choked back the angry words that rose to his lips, for he saw Meta's eyes light up with joy as she gazed toward the shore they had just left. Somewhat alarmed, for he was not yet out of rifle-range, he quickly turned his gaze in the same direction, and was very much relieved when he saw nothing but a bloodhound hunting along the shore. He drew his revolver, but Meta comprehended his purpose, and struck it from his hand into the water.

"Coward!" she exclaimed. "Do you war upon nothing but women and domestic animals?"

He drew back abashed; for with all his wickedness, it was of a negative kind, that might be kept in subjection by a loving hand.

He resumed his rowing, sealing the boat to the other side of the stream, while Prince trotted along the shore, keeping them in sight. Meta grew more hopeful. One faithful friend had not lost sight of her. Might he not be the forerunner of others?

Silently the two sat in the boat, George rowing steadily all the while, and gazing at the beautiful face of the woman as she looked hopefully at the opposite shore. What were his thoughts? Good ones, perhaps, for his face grew kindlier as he gazed and thought; and once he laid down his oars to rig an awning to shield Meta from the burning sun. She looked up in surprise, but when she saw the changed look she thanked him.

George kept on his way until an hour or more after sunset. Then he struck across the stream and landed.

"We are now safe from all pursuit, Meta," said he, more respectfully than he had yet spoken. "We will pass the night on shore, and resume our journey in the morning."

"Where are you taking me?" she asked.

"Where I can have you all to myself, Meta. Where I can love you with a love that knows no equal in the wide world. Oh, Meta! you know not this passion which drives me into all manner of wickedness, that I may possess the object! You, dear Meta, have the power to make me a man or demon. Which shall it be? Let me know my doom!"

He was kneeling at her feet, and grasping her hands firmly that she could not withdraw it. She looked down at his burning face, and knew that his words were sincere, however differently she might interpret them. Yet she could only speak the truth, though it imperiled her life.

"George Matthews," said she, kindly, but firmly, "the way you have chosen will never win a woman's love; and you have gone so far that I never can feel aught but repulsion for you. I say it in all kindness, but I can not perfume myself even to save my own life. Forget me. Take me out of this wilderness, and let me go my way. I will forget and forgive your insults and injustice, if you will take me away from here and leave me forever."

"Never! never!" he hissed, with a terrible oath, as he sprang to his feet. "I have given you your last chance! You will never hear my pleadings again! But I swear that you shall be mine, and I will seal my vow with a kiss."

His horrid fury struck Meta motionless, and not until she felt his polluting arm about her waist did she rouse to action. Then she struggled with the energy of despair, shouting all the while for help.

Help? In that wilderness? But help was near for all that. Pat-pat-pat went the bloodhound's soft feet over the ground, and then there was a tiger-like spring, and the sharp teeth were fastened in George Matthews' arm, freeing Meta. She flew to the boat, jumped in, and seized an oar to push off; but she could not leave Prince. She called him, and he came bounding to her, and springing into the boat, crouched at her feet.

Then she pushed off, and the current caught the skiff, and bore her down the stream, away from that sickening sight which Prince had left.

In comparative safety, and weak and exhausted, she fell asleep, the dog watching over her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE HOSPITAL REVELATION.

META slept in her floating couch until the morning sun, shining full in her face, awoke her. She started up, and gazed about her at the broad fields and comfortable farm-houses, still under the effects of the bewilderment of her awakening; but when her look fell upon Prince, wide awake, and looking up to her intelligently, it all came back to her in its most hideous aspect. She had, however, escaped, and was free once more to go where she pleased; yet Doctor James Martin's revenge—his curse—had not left her. She was yet nameless, homeless, friendless.

Right before her was a city, and she was slowly drifting toward it. It seemed not far away, yet she almost hoped that she might never reach it. Would she find a home there? Yes, in the streets! She gazed and wondered, and racked her dizzy brain in her vain attempts to penetrate the future. How dark it looked—growing darker and darker all the while, for ever ringing in her ears were the words, "nameless, homeless, friendless," and those that came after.

"What have I done?" she murmured;

"what, that I should find no peace, no rest in all the wide world? Father! mother! where are you that you do not come to me, and relieve my bursting heart and my tortured brain?"

She looked down into the deep, dark waters of the Potomac. But one more pang like the last, and she would have thrown herself into the depths, and bid adieu to earth; but, Paul's face seemed looking up to her out of the turbid element—his voice seemed calling to her—his arm seemed drawing her back.

"No! no! no! I must never do that!"

she murmured. "Only cowards flee from life. I'll brave all; reproach, insults, ignominy, everything rather than take my own life."

She seized an oar, and, with the little skill that she had acquired at Willard's, she worked the boat out of the current toward the shore. Past small-boats like her own, past ships, steamboats and vessels of war, heading not the stars and the shouts, she kept on her way and touched the shore at last. With hearty thankfulness she stepped ashore, leaving the boat to whom ever might take it, and, followed by Prince, dragged her way through the streets of the National Capital.

Weak, faint and hungry, she knocked timidly at the door of a house and begged for bread. Once she would have starved ere she stooped to this; but for some reason the love of life had grown strong within her. The tall, bold future was not lifting, but a brightness shone through it that she never saw before, revealing nothing, but promising much.

"Something to eat?" repeated the kind-faced woman. "Certainly, my child. It is not often any one goes away hungry from my door; nor shall they while I have to give. Come in and rest, for you look as if you would drop. Bring the dog, too. He's a noble-looking fellow."

How much good the kind words did;

almost as much as the fragrant coffee, and the light, crisp biscuits. And how reluctantly she arose to go.

"You aren't going?" asked the woman. "You don't look able to stir. Stay with me, dear, to-day and rest. You are welcome."

Meta hesitated. The temptation was very strong.

"You are very good to me," she said.

"I really do not feel able to walk."

"I knew it, child. Come right in here, and lie down."

Meta was only too glad, for she was weary of body and mind.

It was quite late in the afternoon when she awoke, feeling much better for the rest. The interval until supper-time was taken up by Meta in recounting her capture and escape, and never had narrator a better listener.

"Perfectly wonderful!" exclaimed the good woman. "And this dog did all that? Why, if I had him, I wouldn't take a hundred dollars for him; but I suppose he will eat as much as a pig."

After this outburst of enthusiasm, Meta made inquiries about employment. Perhaps the mention of Prince's capacity for vultures reminded her that her purse was empty.

"I know of but one place," replied the lady. "John—that is my boy—was saying this morning that nurses were scarce at the hospital. Would you like such a place?"

"I really do not know," replied Meta.

"I can try it."

"I will speak to John when he comes. Here he is now."

John proved to be a sergeant in the infantry, and on duty at the hospital. In answer to his mother's question as to the probability of procuring a situation for Meta, he said there was not the least doubt, but that she could get one; and readily offered to go up with her in the morning. Meta thanked him, and accepted his escort.

The situation was easily obtained, but there were many objections as to Prince, who could not be induced to leave Meta; and it was only by telling him he had rescued her, that the faithful dog was allowed to remain.

How strange it all seemed to her; but as she looked at the long rows of beds, on each of which lay a poor soldier suffering for love and care, she forgot herself. How her tender heart bled for them. Lacking skill, she made up the deficiency by kindness and sympathy.

How those lonely, suffering men—not one of them so lonely as she—stared when she first appeared among them, followed by Prince. She seemed so like a ray of sunlight bursting in upon them. How they watched her passing from one to another, with a gentle word and a smile that were worth more to them than all the drugs. How they looked for her coming, and murmured a "God bless your sweet face!" when she was there; and when she went away, they thought of her until she came again.

And Meta found pleasure in this self-sacrificing work. It opened her eyes to the fact that her lot was indeed blessed compared to the misery she saw around her, and she went cheerfully about her duties.

She had been there a week when another sufferer was brought into her ward. Not that there was any thing singular about this, for they were brought in every day, but this man was no stranger. It was George Matthews.

All the happiness went out of her face, then, and a crushing weight seemed laid upon her heart. There were fears, too, and doubts as to her proper course. Should she remain and nurse him back to health and life? Or, should she flee ere he saw her? It was a struggle between fear and duty, and duty prevailed.

George could scarce believe his eyes when he saw the beautiful face bending over him, and her voice speaking to him in kindly tones.

"Good heavens!" he articulated, in a feeble voice; "Meta, is it you, come to nurse me back to life?"

"Yes, George."

"God, I am thankful!" he murmured, between the choking sobs. "Meta, while lying there in that deep wood where your faithful dog left me—while lying there to die—I thought over my past life, and I made a solemn promise that if my life was spared, I would make amends for my sins."

How rapidly Meta's thoughts ran over the time from their first meeting until she left him, as he said, to die. How every word that he uttered came back to her. How she longed to ask him one question, but she could not. And he was lying there waiting for her to speak, yet what could she say.

"Meta, you do not seem pleased," he said, reproachfully.

"Oh, George! you do not know how pleased I am!" she said, bursting into tears; "but—"

The blush that unconsciously overspread her face told George what was in her thoughts.

"Oh, Meta!" he cried, "I thought I loved you, but it was nothing—nothing the love I feel for you now!"

Meta drew away and looked coldly at him.

"Nay, Meta, do not misjudge me now. I am not what I was. I thought only of my own pleasure then; now my greatest

pleasure is in seeing you happy. I lied to you about Paul Rodney. He was innocent of the crime that drove him away; and I know nothing of your secret only that you have one; but whatever it is, I know that you are the noblest, purest woman that ever lived. I will see Paul when I get off this sick bed, and if I can bring you two together again, it will be all that I can ask. Meta, I have your forgiveness?"

"Yes, yes!" she cried, joyfully.

"I wish I could forgive myself," he said, sadly.

With a sister's care, Meta tended the remorseful man; and when he was able to travel she went with him, for she had a yearning to see her dear foster-parents again. She never doubted, but with a child's trust, looked forward to the happy meeting.

(To be continued—Commenced in No. 22.)

What a Woman Did.

A STORY OF SAN FRANCISCO LIFE.

BY CAPT. CHARLES HOWARD.

IT was night in San Francisco, and the shining lights of that beautiful constellation, Corona Borealis, the Northern Crown, looked down upon three men standing in the deep shade of a building.

They were, without an exception, tall and rather fashionably-dressed fellows, whose faces bore the marks of rapid traveling down the path of crime which leads to death. They were watching for some person whom they intended to use rather roughly, for one of the trio carried a lariat prepared for a throw.

Ever and anon they glanced around the corner of the building, and down the narrow street, to see if their marked victim was coming.

"I wish he would come," muttered one of the human panthers, with an impatience prompted by the unholy desire to possess something that was not his. "I wish we hadn't come so early; he will not be here for hours. Let us go back and pluck that young Mobilian."

"And while we were there he may come and the golden opportunity would be lost."

"Just so, Ion," said he with the lasso. "As soon as I heard him say that he was going to relieve the bank of some of its notes, I broke for you. On his way home he will stop at Hilliard's to have, of course, a chat with Nellie. And you see that, if she ain't at home he will come right on. He may be here within ten minutes, or he may stay at Hilliard's till twelve. I, for one, am going to wait for him."

"So am I," said one of the others. "I must have money before dawn."

"I want money as bad as either of you," said the impatient fellow. "But I don't want to wait till midnight for him, when we might be relieving the Mobilian of his surplus. I'll wait another hour for Mr. Curtis Redcliffe, and if he ain't here then, I'm off."

"All right, Jack; so much the better for Ion and me when he does come. The division will be by halves, not thirds."

At that moment a cough sounded upon the ears of the gold-thirsty trio, and the one called Ion looked down the street.

"Somebody's coming," he whispered, "but I can not distinguish him. Look for yourself, Rafe; you have seen Redcliffe."

Rafe Bewick, who carried the rope, looked at the form approaching in the starlight, and then turned to his companions with a grim smile of satisfaction.

"Who is it?" they asked, simultaneously.

"None other than Curtis Redcliffe," he answered.

"Step back a little, boys, and draw your toothpicks. I want a good swing at him with the rope. I'll drop it over his head and pinion his arms in a jiffy. Now mind,

"So you did not find me home, then?"
She smiled.

"No, Nellie."

"I have been to Mrs. Watson's," she replied. "I thought you would stop at our house on your way home. I did not want to keep you waiting, as I thought you would tarry until my return, so I curtailed my visit and hurried homeward."

Reaching the Randlaw block I heard voices and paused. Then I heard you bid some to finish their work, and instantly divining your situation, I, pistol in hand, darted forward. The first thing I saw distinctly was the knife flashing over a prostrate man, whom I thought was you.

"With a quick aim I fired at the villain's breast, and saw him rise and fall back ward. Then I sprang into the alley yonder, from whence I could see the remaining couple without being seen by them."

"And you would have fired had they remained," said Curtis, admiring the brave, beautiful girl before him.

"Yes; my pistol was directed at the breast of the one that held the rope."

"It was Rafe Bewick. I wish you had fired, Nellie, and thus rid the world of her greatest curse. But he will get his just deserts some day, which I hope is not far distant."

A few minutes later the couple were walking from the tragic spot.

"I shall go armed henceforward," said Curtis. "I wonder how the villains knew that I drew money from the bank to-night."

"They are shrewd fellows, Curtis," said Nellie, and I think they will leave the city, fearing an arrest."

Nelle Hilliard divined rightly, for, after burying Ion Markham, Rafe Bewick, and his companion fled to the mines, where they cheated many a poor fellow out of his hard-earned gold.

Two months after the scenes related above, Curtis Redcliff married the brave woman who saved his life when the assassin's knife was about to cleave his heart.

Buck Harvey's Trap.

BY RALPH RINGWOOD.

FAR up the Kentucky river, where the giant cliffs shoot perpendicularly upward from the water's edge for more than a thousand feet, and where the stream, pent up between the granite walls, dashes downward into a speed equal to that of a mill-slice, there is a peculiarly-shaped rock, known as *Harvey's Trap*.

This rock is triangular, or nearly so, in shape, perfectly flat, some three or four feet in diameter, and lies directly in a narrow pathway that skirts the verge of the precipice and gradually descends to the entrance of a large cavern that penetrates the face of the cliff a few feet from the surface.

The venturesome pedestrian, after stepping over this rock, turns sharply to the left, almost at a right angle, and passing round the elbow, finds that he is treading upon a narrow ledge, scarce twenty-four inches in width, the face of the cliff upon the one hand, while upon the other yawns a frightful chasm, at the bottom of which, far below, he sees the flash of sunlight on the water as it hurries by.

Projecting above the verge of the precipice, directly in front of this rock we have described, there was, at the time of which I write, and indeed until recently, a tall, slender hickory sapling that had taken root in the crevices of the rock, and which grew and thrived well notwithstanding its precarious hold.

This much, by way of description, is necessary to the reader's fully comprehending what I am about to relate.

It was the evening, or rather afternoon, of the fourth day subsequent to the disastrous battle of the Blue Licks, about an hour by sun, when the form of a man, clad in the garb of a hunter, cautiously emerged from a thicket a few paces in rear of the cliff. Pausing an instant as though to make sure he was unobserved, he uttered a low whistle that quickly brought another individual to his side from out the brush.

"Come! to the cave," said the first, "this rock leaves no trail!" and so speaking, the two hunters bounded lightly across the open space and disappeared down the narrow pathway that led to the cave below.

The movements of the men were hasty, as though no time were to be lost in getting to cover, and not without ample reason. Scarcely had their heads sunk below the level of the rock, when the undergrowth was again parted, and another form stole out as the others had done; but this time it was an Indian warrior, equipped and painted for the war-path.

A moment later he was joined by two others, and then the whole party, after a few words spoken in deep, guttural tones, began a rapid search for the lost trail.

But, as the hunter had said, the hard surface of the cliffs gave no sign, and, closely scanning every inch as they went, the warriors moved gradually down the stream and were soon lost to view.

Fully half an hour passed before the silence was again broken. At the expiration of that time a head was cautiously protruded around the cliff where the path turned, and a moment later, the hunter we had first seen, stepped into full view, closely followed by his companion.

"I say, Buck," said the latter, in a low voice, "We've got to hurry up or the reds'll be down on us—"

"Sartinly! sartinly!" was the reply, "Yer know when Buck Harvey starts to do an Injin turn he don't lag by the way. Come; rech out an' see if ye kin draw the saplin' in."

It was evident that the fugitives had been concocting some plan while in the cavern, and that they were now putting it in operation.

While the hunter was endeavoring to reach the branches of the hickory sapling of which we have spoken, evidently with the intention of bending the elastic trunk in toward where they stood, Buck Harvey was busy with a coil of small, though stout rope which he held in his hand.

This he finally succeeded in getting free of kinks and tangles, and, after forming a loop of one end, he carefully laid it aside and proceeded to assist his comrade in securing the tree.

This was a matter of no little difficulty, and it required the utmost efforts of both men to bend the springy shoot into proper position; but, when once down, it was easily held by one man.

Harvey now took from the pocket of his hunting-shirt a number of forked sticks, as large, perhaps, as one's thumb, which he quickly drove into the crevices around the outer edge of the triangular rock we have herefore described. Around these he then drew the noose he had formed in the rope, made the other end fast to the bent sapling, which was gradually eased up until all the strain was upon the cord, and the trap or "snare" was completed.

"Thar!" said the hunter, "ef one 'em doos get his foot inter that he'll see snakes erer."

With a last look to see that all was secure, and after dropping a small piece of patching in the pathway between the trap and the edge of the cliff, both men again disappeared down the narrow ledge to the cave.

Several hours passed, and the full moon was just rising above the tree-tops on the hill beyond the river, when a slight sound from above caught the quick ear of Harvey.

"Hark, Ned," he whispered to his comrade, who was dozing in one corner. "The impes ar' abroad, an' we'll hear from 'em soon."

Both men grasped their rifles and stole to the mouth of the cavern.

Above them they could see the lower part of the bent tree, the top being lost behind the edge of the cliff. But this was enough; and they waited and watched.

Five, ten, twenty minutes passed, when suddenly a guttural exclamation, as of surprise, was heard.

The thought, I must say, went to my very heart, but still it was a suggestion to be rudely dismissed, though that did not explain much that was essentially mysterious in her conduct. Why, indeed, had she sought me out the second time? why should she have stopped with me and nuzzled me, and then, after owning her tenderness for me, why had she fled in such a strange and mysterious way?

Why!—the answer that she could have given would have been sublime; but I could not even suspect it.

The river before me was swift in the extreme, swift enough to preclude all idea of my swimming it; so that my only plan was to go upward in search of a ford or rift, or a place where the channel was wider and less like a rapid.

Its banks were bordered by the ordinary trees, but scarcely any sign of animal life was visible, save where a few lizards basked in the sun, or little birds hopped about on the twigs.

The pathway along the river was not very easily traveled. I had to make long detours every now and then, but succeeded in keeping it in sight. This was absolutely necessary for my purpose. But as I advanced, the chances of success seemed to diminish rather than increase, as the river grew rapidier than ever, while the way was so difficult that I do not believe I made five miles the whole day.

At eventide I halted, exhausted and worn out.

Where I selected my camp was under a steep, overhanging rock. The space I occupied was not more than a dozen yards square, but it was sheltered, and did not necessitate a fire, which I wished to avoid, lest I might frighten away the fugitives, or bring more around me than I cared to meet.

The night was pitchy dark.

My dog lay at my feet, exceedingly wearied with his day's journey. I was so myself, and yet it was a long time before I could go to sleep.

My rest was not long. I awoke with a severe headache; rubbed my eyes, and looked across the river. As certain as I was alive, there was a fire on the opposite side—a fire, too, burning in a position which made it all but certain that I had fallen on my fugitives.

On the opposite side of the river, the banks were perpendicular, sheer down to the water. The camp of the others was on the summit, and all I could make of it was the reddened under branches of a tree that overhung the fire, and which branches were every now and then illuminated by a red and flickering light.

I ascended to the summit of the cliff, and there, using my telescope, I saw all that was passing.

It was a camp-fire under an overspreading tree, and by it sat two figures. There was no doubt about it, one was the Indian girl, the other a man of much darker hue—a negro, in fact, but with none of that ferocity, nor none of that revolting ugliness which had so disgusted me in the Fan negroes, whose cannibalism is to be read in their faces.

Now this man was strong and powerful,

and had evidently compelled Pablina to fly from me, when our two canoes met upon the waters.

What was to be done? To leave my boat was dangerous, as they might come upon it and ransack its contents; but then, I could not bear the uncertainty under which I labored. My gun, my dog and my lasso, was all I took, and with these I proposed to follow the trail.

Fortunately, the prickly gourd of which I have before spoken was here in abundance, growing in perfect hillocks. It was meat and drink both to me and to my dog, who, like the hyenas antelopes and birds, had taken a great fancy to it.

For some time the trail was not difficult to follow, and in a very few minutes I

came aware, from the impressions on the sand and elsewhere, that the two fugitives were carrying a heavy weight—of course, their canoe. This aroused me to active exertion, as it proved their settled determination to flee from me. After a short period they had entered a dense growth of underwood and bushes, through which I knew not really how they made their way. In this wood there appeared nothing alive but black and white crows, that disdained us in operation.

While the hunter was endeavoring to reach the branches of the hickory sapling of which we have spoken, evidently with the intention of bending the elastic trunk in toward where they stood, Buck Harvey was busy with a coil of small, though stout rope which he held in his hand.

It was evident that the fugitives had been concocting some plan while in the cavern, and that they were now putting it in operation.

Pablina was making an effort to persuade him of the truth of something he would not listen to. She shook, his head negatively; he pointed upward; he made odd and unintelligible signs, but they were evidently of disbelief.

Pablina laid her head upon his arm and looked up in his face with such a winning smile as I would have given words to have her give me.

And yet, somehow, just then I felt none of that bitter, corroding jealousy which might have naturally assailed me. That she was trying to persuade him he ought to have waited for the sail-boat was to me quite self-evident, but he was hard of belief, and could not get over the fear my appearance had inspired him with.

To end the discussion, lie cast himself down beside the fire, and was soon asleep, or feigning to be so.

After half an hour I came upon a wide and rapid stream, and here the trail ended. My chase after the infatuated Indian girl seemed to me to resemble that of some benighted toper making his weary way after an *ignis fatuus* or will o' the wisp, over bush, briar and brake. Though evidently attached to me, and feeling for me sentiments almost akin to my own, she fled from me like some forest Diana from the lover she feared and yet loved.

Woman is a riddle, and I at that time decided her to be the most extraordinary one.

But, then, what right had I to judge this innocent child of nature, who, though to a certain extent a savage, had her feelings and her sense of right and wrong?

Young as she was, how knew I that she had not a husband? In tropical countries girls marry at eleven, and are antique grandmothers at twenty-five.

Why should Pablina not be married, and why should this not be the reason that she had fled from me?

The thought, I must say, went to my very heart, but still it was a suggestion to be rudely dismissed, though that did not explain much that was essentially mysterious in her conduct. Why, indeed, had she sought me out the second time? why should she have stopped with me and nuzzled me, and then, after owning her tenderness for me, why had she fled in such a strange and mysterious way?

Why!—the answer that she could have given would have been sublime; but I could not even suspect it.

She glanced across, and I knew that she saw me, for her hands were clasped together in an attitude of supplication.

But I was no more advanced than I was before. No further conversation was possible. She was evidently afraid to wake her companion; I knew not what to say that she could understand. It was most annoying and vexations, as unless I could communicate with her, at daybreak her guardian would carry her off once more—never for us to meet again in this world.

It was a most painful position. We were neither of us sufficiently advanced in each other's language to be able to have an explanation in a few, short and pithy words. And thus, with an occasional whisper across the gulf, impassable as that of Tartarus, the night sped away, and then gray dawn arose.

I was on my feet with my arms outstretched toward her, while she, with downcast eyes, appeared anxious to avoid showing her own deep emotion.

My gun leaned on the hollow of my arm.

I glanced at the swift torrent below. It was not to be crossed.

I pointed to it. She shook her head gloomily and sadly, and then raising her finger pointed upward.

I understood her. The stream was to be crossed at a point higher up the river. I made signs that I would move on. She nodded, and herself made similar signs.

At that instant, the man who held her in a kind of subjection rose to his feet, rushed at her angrily, caught her by the wrist, and dragged her out of sight ere I could speak or act. My gun was at my shoulder in an instant, but it was too late, even if I could have made up my mind to have shot him, without having some better excuse than I had at present.

I was dumbfounded. Which way this man would take her was a mystery too much for me to unravel. However, irresolution would be of no avail, and my mind was instantly made up to return to my boat, to coast along until I passed the river, and then to land, and, aided by my dog, to hunt up the fugitives, and at any risk and peril to take Pablina from her guardian.

I was dumbfounded. Which way this man would take her was a mystery too much for me to unravel. However, irresolution would be of no avail, and my mind was instantly made up to return to my boat, to coast along until I passed the river, and then to land, and, aided by my dog, to hunt up the fugitives, and at any risk and peril to take Pablina from her guardian.

The journey back was performed with a rapidity and recklessness for which both my body and my clothes suffered a long time afterward, but I reached the boat in an incredible short space of time, took a hasty meal, and seeing from the shore an opening in the breakers, started at once; and, dashing through two combing waves, found myself in the open sea.

Awake before a rattling breeze went the canoe—away, hope at the helm and impatience at the bow, until my vision was gladdened, in about half an hour, by the sight of an opening which I saw and felt, from the excessive rapidity of its current, was the river I was in search of.

So quick did the water rush, that it was impossible to enter the river; but about a hundred yards beyond it was a convenient cove into which I ran the canoe, and, fastening it carefully, took my gun and dog, and started in pursuit.

About a mile up the river, I came upon a solution of part of the mystery.

Across the river, where it was swiftest, perhaps, and where the water rushed so rapidly, as to form almost a rapid and fall, was a rope of coconut fiber, lashed each side to a stout tree. By means of this it was possible to cross the river. Had I known it, what misery—what doubt—what suspense I might have been saved, I did not stop, however, in my course, hurrying on along the banks of the river, until at length wearied, exhausted and utterly out of breath, I cast myself down upon the spot where she had lain the night before.

Now this man was strong and powerful,

and had evidently compelled Pablina to fly from me, when our two canoes met upon the waters.

What was to be done? I could have

shot him easily as he sat up in earnest conversation with the Indian girl, but it was quite evident that, though he exercised a very severe control over her, still they were not enemies. They were conversing in an undertone, and they were serious, but still their actions, the expression of their countenances, were friendly.

Now this man was strong and powerful,

and had evidently compelled Pablina to fly from me, when our two canoes met upon the waters.

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THE QUESTION,

BY JOSEPH JR.

Well, well, who ever had thought I'd be single at thirty and five, in a city where beaux are so few, and girls thick as bees in a hive!

Yet such is the case, but the fault is not certainly mine, I'll allow, that rendered my gallantries vain, and makes me a bachelor now.

The first one I offered my hand to, And a share of my poverty, too—

Put her handkerchief up to her eyes, And went straight to crying "boo-hoo."

When I turned to her quickly, and spoke:

"If my question has wounded your head or your heart, I will take it all back,

but I didn't mean half that I said."

The next I asked on my knees, and I wanted three months for a reply.

But I told her that was too long, and the next one said, "Yes," in a trice,

and I was both shocked and amused,

for she was too anxious by far,

and I begged that I might be excused,

Another exceedingly fair,

that I woso for six months, I should think,

She kept me in love and despair,

Till I neither could sleep, eat or drink,

And at length when I asked for her hand,

She started, her gaze on me beat,

And said that "It never would do,

My husband would never consent."

The last one I asked was last night,

Ere I took my departure, quite slow,

But she made a mistake worse than all,

And very unlukily, said, "No."

Still, when the girls cease to be

Too anxious, too slow, or too fast,

So they are anxious enough,

I may come to be married at last.

The Specter Captain.

A SKETCH OF BARNEGAT.

BY ROGER STARBUCK.

BORN among the wreckers of Barnegat, Jack Brand, at seventeen, had all the reckless, dare-devil, defiant manner that characterized the rest of the fierce coast men. Nevertheless in his clear blue eyes, and upon his handsome, manly face, was a something that spoke of good impulses and a kind nature, which had survived his bad "bringing up." His mother—the wife of one of the wreckers—had, in fact, been a good woman. Both his parents, however, had died when he was a mere child, leaving him to the care of wreckers who would willingly have throttled a man for the sake of a few gold pieces or a package of India goods.

Thus the boy grew up to imbibe wrong ideas, although it is doubtful he would have perpetrated a desperate crime. Often in his dreams he would seem to hear a smothered cry for help—then a groan—then a splash, as of a body being thrown into the water. This constantly-recurring fancy inspired him with a horror of murder, which grew with his growth.

He was a mere child when he really did hear the horrible noises mentioned.

A vessel had been wrecked off the coast, the captain alone had survived and been brought to shore. Jack could remember his appearance well; a stout man, wearing a peacock jacket, and pants turned up over thick blue woolen stockings—the feet incased in broad, heavy shoes. He also remembered hearing him say he had a twin-brother engaged in the merchant service, in a vessel plying between Liverpool and Boston.

On a dark, stormy night this captain, who had given his name as Bond, was murdered by one of the wreckers, a fierce fellow, with low brow, and hooked nose, called "Red Sam" by his comrades, who merely winked at the deed. It was the cry of the unfortunate, and the splash of his body, as it was thrown into the sea, that little Jack had heard so long ago.

One day—Jack was then eighteen years old—the wind came on to blow a terrific gale. Toward night a sail was seen vainly striving to beat off the dangerous coast.

The result was a wreck. At about ten o'clock at night a boat containing the survivors—two men and a young girl of sixteen—reached the coast, and was hauled upon the beach by the wild wreckers. With the light of the lanterns flashing upon their faces, their unkempt beards, long hair, and rough garbs, the wreckers looked more like demons than human beings. As the occupants of the boat stepped out, they were surrounded, the poor girl drenched with spray and shivering with cold, shrinking back at the sight of the fierce men.

There was a chest in the boat. This was handed forth, and the wreckers were about bursting it open, when the young girl threw herself upon it.

"Oh no! no!" she pleaded, in a sweet, plaintive voice; "it contains nothing of value—only a few dresses and some trinkets, which were left to me by my poor mother, who died in England?"

Involuntarily the rough fellows paused. Such loveliness as this girl was seldom seen upon that rude coast. Her great, brown eyes shone like stars, her face was oval and tinted with a soft, rosy color, her dark, unbound hair fell twining around her matchless waist.

"Come!" exclaimed Red Sam, "this is nonsense. Them trinkets is gold; I'll swear, and I'm in for 'em!"

So saying, he threw himself upon the chest.

A strong arm hurled him to one side. He turned, showing his teeth, his eyes flashing, to confront young Jack Brand.

"No, Sam, you shall not touch that chest.

Let the poor child keep her trinkets!"

"Curse ye! Who gave you leave to interfere?"

The girl interposed. Her brown eye made Sam shrink back—it was so full of purity and yet so penetrating.

"Don't quarrel, men. Here, I'll give you the worth of those trinkets, if you'll only let me keep them!"

So saying, she took out her purse, and threw Sam a couple of gold pieces.

"Money!" he yelled, and scrabbled up the gold.

Wreckers have no gallantry. The purse was quickly snatched from the girl's hand, and the rest of her money taken possession of. For interfering in this little game Jack Brand was knocked senseless.

Meanwhile the chest was lugged off into one of the wretched cabins along the coast.

"If you won't meddle with that chest," pleaded the girl, who, bending with feminine pity over Jack, now saw him open his eyes, "I'll give you more money when I get to my brother's, in Boston!"

Her speech was addressed to those who were presenting the chest.

Soon after quarters were assigned her in a cabin occupied by one of the wreckers. Through the window Jack Brand watched her a long time, drinking in her loveliness and swearing to himself that he would die in her defense. Then hebethought him of the chest. Perhaps, even at this moment, the wreckers were rifling it. He hurried along the coast in the direction of the cabin whither the chest had been conveyed.

Chancing to glance seaward, as he moved on, he saw a light about three miles off.

"Another vessel!" he muttered; "but she will not be wrecked, at all events, as the gale has gone down. I'm tired of this wretched life. Somehow the sight of that girl has changed me—made me feel as if I wanted to be a good man."

Thus communing, he moved on, now and then gazing seaward to fancy he could make out the outlines of a boat coming shoreward. Finally he gained the cabin he was in search of. There was a bright light in it. He peered through the window, to behold Red Law, armed with a pistol, bending over the chest, which he was endeavoring to break open. The pistol was evidently for the purpose of keeping off any other wrecker who should come for a share of the spoil.

"The rascal!" muttered Jack—"that's her chest, and I'm determined it shall not be molested."

Fortunately, there was no look upon the chest.

Through this Jack, stealing gently, suddenly pounced upon Sam, hurling him back from the chest, and endeavoring to wrench his pistol from his hand.

A desperate struggle ensued, during which the pistol dropped from Sam's grasp. He drew his knife, and endeavored to plunge it into Jack's heart. The youth avoided it by rolling over, and managed to clutch his assailant's throat. Sam, who was a powerful man, released himself by pushing Jack over with his knees. At the same moment both men sprang up. Sam having now secured his pistol. His finger was upon the trigger, when Jack rushed toward him, and, bracing his knee upon the chest, endeavored to push him back. Sam, however, quickly recovering his balance, was about discharging the pistol.

"It war durin' the time when Cap'n Jack (the celebrated ranger, Jack Hays), led the rangers, and the sartumstances uv which I'm about to tell, took place. Most uv you felers know'd the cap'n, some uv yer didn't, an' that's the wuss fur yer, an' them as did know him 'll say he war a screamer; warn't he, boyees?"

"He war?" "you bet I!" "nothin' else!" were heard on every side.

"Lordy, jess to see that man'mong a lot uv Comanches, er a grisuv greasers! It war a sight, I war."

This bit of boy-play done with, Chris continued:

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